

# ACCESSIBILITY OF EMERGENCY VIDEO PROGRAMMING TO PERSONS WITH HEARING AND VISUAL DISABILITIES

## Background

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) now requires video programming distributors (like broadcasters and cable operators) to make local emergency information accessible to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and to persons who are blind or have visual disabilities. This means that emergency information must be provided both aurally and in a visual format. Video programming distributors include broadcasters, cable operators, satellite television services (such as DirecTV and the Dish Network), and other multichannel video programming distributors.

In general, emergency information that is provided during a regularly scheduled newscast or a newscast that interrupts regular programming must be accessible to people with hearing or vision disabilities. However, there could be a limited number of instances when an emergency affects the broadcast station or non-broadcast network or distributor and it may be impossible to provide accessible emergency information.

## How Does the Emergency Information Need to Be Made Accessible?

In the case of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, emergency information that is provided in the audio portion of programming must be provided using closed captioning or other methods of visual presentation, such as open captioning, crawls, or scrolls that appear on the screen. Emergency information provided by means other than closed captioning should not block any closed captioning, and closed captioning should not block any emergency information provided by means other than closed captioning. Closed captions are captions that are hidden in the video signal. You can access closed captions through your remote control or on-screen menu (all TVs with a 13" or larger diameter screen manufactured after 1993 have caption decoder circuitry) or through a special decoder. Open captions are an integral part of the television picture, like subtitles in a movie. In other words, open captions cannot be turned off. Text that advances very slowly across the bottom of the screen is referred to as a crawl, and displayed text or graphics that move up, down, or across the screen are said to scroll.

Emergency information that is provided in the video portion of a regularly scheduled newscast or a newscast that interrupts regular programming must be made accessible. This requires the oral description of emergency information in the main audio, such as open video description. If the emergency information is being provided in the video portion or programming that is not a regularly scheduled newscast or a newscast that interrupts regular programming (e.g., the programmer provides the emergency information through "crawling" or "scrolling" during regular programming), this information must be accompanied by an aural tone. This tone is to alert persons with vision disabilities that the broadcaster is providing emergency information, and alert such persons to tune to a radio, the Secondary Audio Programming ("SAP") channel or a designated digital channel for more information.



### What Qualifies as an Emergency?

Emergency information is information that is intended to further the protection of life, health, safety, or property. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Immediate weather situations: tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, tidal waves, earthquakes, icing conditions, heavy snows, widespread fires, warnings and watches of impending changes in weather.
- Community situations such as: discharge of toxic gases, widespread power failures, industrial explosions, civil disorders, school closings and changes in school bus schedules resulting from such conditions.

### What Information about the Emergency Must Be Provided?

The information provided visually and aurally must include critical details regarding the emergency and how to respond. Critical details could include, among other things:

- Specific details regarding the areas that will be affected by the emergency;
- Evacuation orders, detailed descriptions of areas to be evacuated, and specific evacuation routes; and
- Approved shelters or the way to take shelter in one's home, instructions on how to secure personal property, road closures, and how to obtain relief assistance.

Although programmers may not be required to provide all of the information about an emergency situation that they are providing visually or aurally in an accessible format, there may be other details not listed here that are critical to responding appropriately in the event of an emergency that must be provided visually and aurally. In determining whether particular details need to be presented visually and aurally, programmers may rely on their own good faith judgments.

### How Do I Complain if I Think Someone is Not Complying With the FCC Rule?

If you have a complaint, you can first contact the video programming distributor, although you are not required to do so. You can also complain to the FCC. Your complaint should include:

- The name of the video programming distributor (and cable or satellite distributors, if applicable) against whom the complaint is alleged;
- The date and time of the omission of emergency information; and
- The type of emergency.

You may contact the FCC by letter, facsimile transmission, telephone (voice/TRS/TTY), Internet e-mail, audio-cassette recording, Braille, or any other method that would best accommodate your disability.



The Disability Rights Office of the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau provides assistance in informal dispute resolution and in obtaining compliance with the rules. You may write to the FCC at the address given on this fact sheet or contact:

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Phone: 1-888-225-5322 (voice); 1-888-835-5322 (TTY)  
E-mail: [fccinfo@fcc.gov](mailto:fccinfo@fcc.gov)  
Fax: 202-418-0232

### What Happens After I File a Complaint?

The Commission will notify the video programming distributor of the complaint, and the distributor will reply to the complaint within 30 days. Based on the information in the complaint and the response, and any other information the FCC may request from either party, the FCC will make its decision and take the appropriate action. To learn more about the FCC's requirements for access to televised emergency programming, visit the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau's Web site at, [www.fcc.gov/cgb](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb).

For this or any other consumer publication in an alternative format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print, or audio) please either write us (at the above address), call us (at the above phone number), or send an e-mail to [FCC504@fcc.gov](mailto:FCC504@fcc.gov).

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on [www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html).

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